

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE WORKSHOP

On Wednesday, January 19, 2022, the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) Subcommittee on Ocean Science and Technology (SOST) hosted an Environmental Justice Workshop for its subcommittee and working group members. This virtual event, building on the [SOST Environmental Justice Webinar](#) held in the fall of 2021, convened over 130 Federal representatives across 26 member agencies to advance environmental justice through work on ocean and coastal issues.

This workshop was motivated by interest from SOST members about how to integrate environmental justice into agency and interagency work and how to leverage Federal resources to better serve low-income and marginalized people, particularly Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color, who are disproportionately impacted by environmental harms. **Dr. Gretchen Goldman**, Assistant Director for Environmental Science, Engineering, Policy, and Justice at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, provided an introductory presentation on environmental justice in the Federal context. She summarized the rich history of activism and leadership by Black, Latinx, and Indigenous advocates that initiated the environmental justice movement and highlighted key pathways for agencies to consider environmental justice in their work today saying, “It is notable that the Administration brought in environmental justice leaders, incorporated their ideas, and is now taking steps to address those inequities in bigger ways. We have this larger platform, not only for Federal recognition of environmental justice issues, but also for action on a scale that’s never happened before in this Nation.”

Dr. Emily Eisenhauer, a social scientist at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), kicked off topical presentations by providing an overview of EPA’s solutions-driven research initiatives and resources on how to integrate environmental justice principles across all stages of research development and implementation. She emphasized the importance of listening to impacted communities and people rather than developing projects based solely on Federal priorities, saying, “Both environmental justice research and solutions driven research seek to have concrete, real-world impacts and they do that, most especially, by working together with and seeking to meet the needs of users and beneficiaries of the research – particularly those who are most impacted by environmental problems.”

Ms. Chelsea Combest-Friedman, Program Director (Acting) of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Regional Integrated Sciences and Assessments Program (RISA), additionally shared on-the-ground examples of environmental justice implementation through RISA’s network of regional teams and their multi-pronged approach to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

She stated, “We're trying to build this bridge between the researchers who have climate expertise and knowledge and the community networks and organizations who are leading a lot of the justice and equity work in those in those communities.”

Dr. Jennifer Wilcox, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Office of Fossil Energy and Carbon Management at the Department of Energy (DOE), closed out the presentation portion of the workshop by discussing environmental justice in the context of the carbon capture and marine carbon dioxide removal. She framed justice as a critical consideration for all future actions on carbon capture saying, “Because of the nascent nature of the carbon dioxide removal (CDR) field, the Federal government can play a critical role in ensuring the equity and justice are core to our efforts from the very beginning. We plan to prioritize consultation with communities and stakeholders that could participate in or be affected by CDR, including frontline communities, environmental and climate justice organizations, Tribal Nations, labor groups, industry, and academia.”

All three speakers then engaged in a brief Q&A session moderated by SOST Co-Chairs, during which key considerations for SOST activities emerged, including: avoiding “parachute science,” leveraging the networks of existing local and regional groups or agencies, and building long-term trust. Following this opportunity for questions, participants transitioned to breakout rooms based on interagency working group (IWG) affiliations to discuss environmental justice challenges and goals in their own work. A common theme across groups included the importance of making sure information and data produced by agencies is not only available but also useful and used by the communities who need it most, as well as a commitment to further equitable, inclusive participation in the sciences through support for education initiatives. Additionally, groups discussed how to avoid approaching environmental justice from a business-as-usual perspective and how to hold IWGs and the SOST accountable for meaningful change.

The conversations that took place during this workshop will continue through future SOST actions, and SOST leadership is excited by the strong interest in the development of long-term strategies to advance environmental justice through leveraging the power of interagency coordination and activities. As the lead interagency entity for Federal coordination on ocean science and technology, the SOST plays a key role in shaping the direction of activities and investments for the broader ocean community. The SOST will continue to build on its efforts to learn about environmental justice connections to ocean and coastal issues and support IWG efforts to put environmental justice principles in action across their fields.

